

C O N S I D E R A T I O N S

Addressed to those who have

Subscribed towards the Increase

OF THE

M I L I T A R Y,

AND

ILLUMINATED

For the VICTORY of

LORD HOWE.

IN TWO

L E T T E R S.

To — — —

by observer

R



W. H.

11

11

T W O L E T T E R S, &c.

Ipsa sibi pretium virtus —

To — —

SIR,

BEING tied down to no occupation, I have acquired the habit of watching the course of events, and sometimes I express my opinion on them in writing. During the prevailing spirit of subscribing for the defence of our country against a French invasion, and of illuminating upon the intelligence of victory, I have been witness to many instances of conduct which prove such depravity, that the Philosopher's idea of all things proceeding by gradual melioration to perfection

A seems

seems to be "such stuff as dreams are made of." That men are liable to fall insensibly under the government of fear or interest (the two most powerful enemies of virtue) is a well known and lamentable truth; but pity must be turned into indignation, when we hear men of strong understanding, good education, and hitherto irreproachable character, declare that their sense of rectitude must give way to considerations of a *personal* nature.

I am sensible, says one, that when I appear to approve the war, or rejoice in our successes, I contradict my feelings; but I must illuminate upon these public occasions, otherwise the mob may offer violence to my person: already am I a marked man in consequence of my political principles. In my opinion, says another, none of the victories which the enemies of France obtain either by sea or land, are proper grounds for rejoicing, because they further the design of dictating a constitution to a foreign

foreign nation, with whose civil concerns we ought not to interfere : I look upon benevolences as an objectionable method of supporting even a just war : but still I must both subscribe and illuminate, for I could not bear to be the theme of general conversation, and what is worse, to be called upon, wherever I go, to defend my opinions against the attack of hosts.

Past we on Sir from these examples in which timidity of temper triumphs over the dictates of conscience, to others which manifest an equal degree of subjection to the voice of interest. The worldly-minded are perhaps a more numerous race than the dastardly. I would never illuminate, says one, but that I fear the mob will pull my house down. It is true, says another, that I am in easy circumstances, but all my relations are on the other side, they will be angry with me and make a difference in their Will, if I do not shew myself a friend to administration, whose measures however I cannot but condemn.

A 2 The

The end they propose by hostilities against France is unjustifiable, in their victories I can feel no delight, but I must *seem* to partake of the general joy. My connexions can do nothing for me, says a third, I have a wife and family, who depending solely on my exertions for support, press me incessantly and with the greatest anxiety to follow the general example : I perceive the impropriety of suffering myself to be overcome by their intreaties, but should I continue inflexible, my business will, I am sure leave me, and myself and family be plunged into poverty. The sacrifice is too great: would that I were in an independant situation! A fourth tells me, I would neither subscribe nor illuminate, but I hold a place under government; I know what is expected from me; and if I do not comply, I must make up my mind to part with my ferment.

This is a specimen Sir, of the language I have not unfrequently heard in these times —times, which however afflicting in some respects

respects, are useful in distinguishing him who is to be honored for his unshaken integrity, from him who forfeits all title to our esteem by a kind of fair weather virtue, which has not strength enough to withstand the first storm of adversity.

Tell me ye, who thus sacrifice principle to motives of safety or interest, are *right* and *wrong* dependant upon outward condition ? Were martyrs to a love of truth ever formed of such materials as you ? You call yourselves christians, do you find any authority for such conduct in the life of your Master ? He had courage to oppose prevailing opinions ; worldly honors and emoluments could not seduce him from the path of his duty ; nor the terrors of pain and death shake his virtuous purpose. He sealed his doctrine with his blood.

Tell me further, should you hear a person say, I must cringe and ~~favor~~, I must not mind a little deceit, otherwise I cannot

thrive in the world, would ye not pronounce him undeserving of confidence ? How are ye better ? He does but speak a language contrary to his heart, and so do you by your conduct. But perhaps you will say, you cannot however charge us with insincerity, do we not honestly avow that we do what we disapprove ? True, you make this confession to those who already know your principles, that you may not appear to them inconsistent ; but you would not that your motives for compliance should *generally* be known, for then your object would be defeated. You would not in that case have credit for being an approver of the war ; hence the mob might insult you, or break your windows ; hence you might be more exposed to lose your business, for besides being disliked for your political sentiments, you would be despised for your hypocrisy.

Let me put another question to you—
would you not, if a man were impelled by

poverty

poverty to steal your purse, think him a proper object of punishment ? He does but as you do, he violates a moral duty for the sake of personal considerations, **and perhaps** can alledge more in excuse for himself. Absolute indigence furnished **him** with the temptation, **you perhaps** have sold your conscience to add to competence, or perhaps to increase opulence.

To such of you as felt some struggle before principle yielded to fear or interest, it may be proper to offer the following remark. Much less hope is there of you, than of those who have done wrong through want of reflection. The time of consideration may come, and **they** may follow its dictates ; but **you** have enjoyed its advantages without availing yourselves of them. Is there a chance that you will ever become obedient to the directions of reason and virtue after having deliberately set them at defiance for the sake of avoiding personal inconvenience, or obtaining worldly advantage?

A 4

Let

(10)

Let the doctrine of habits alarm you. In opposition to your sense of right you have been governed by unworthy motives : with less difficulty will you in future yield even to the same degree of temptation. Whilst your evil propensities acquire force by indulgence, your moral principle is weakened. Perhaps by exertion you may even now recover ; but the effort must be very vigorous, or you are for ever lost to the refined enjoyments inseparable from a life of virtue.

July, 26th. 1794.

OBSERVATOR.

*Tecum prius ergo voluta.
Hæc animo*

To — —

SIR.

IN my last letter I could not help expressing myself with some severity against those persons, who through fear or interest sanctioned by their example, what they condemn in their hearts ; ~~now~~ let me ^{now} examine the arguments of those who sincerely approved the donations for the increase of the military, and the illumination for the victory of Lord Howe.

Many contend, that voluntary subscriptions make the burden fall only on those who can well bear it, and are therefore a better method of supporting the present expensive contest, than taxes which must affect the indigent classes.

For the Minister of the Parish to collect from house to house is not perhaps the strongest

strongest proof that subscriptions are voluntary. No objection could have existed on this head, if by Advertisement a place had been fixed in each Town, where each person who chose, might have left his contribution. That taxes must affect the poor does not follow, for such taxes might be selected, as would only fall on the opulent. Let this answer suffice for the present.

Some of the opposers of the war make use of the following reasoning. We condemn the war against France, because its object is to dictate a Constitution to a foreign country : upon this principle we must likewise be sorry to see the French invade England, and dictate a Constitution to us. When we subscribe towards our own internal defence, we subscribe for the prevention of this evil.

That this would be an evil is readily confessed, but you must allow that the French, if our own bad example ought to have an authority, are justified not only

in

in attempting to invade our country, but likewise to overturn our Constitution. Let us see however whether you act consistently with your own principle. The more troops are raised for the defence of England, the more may be sent abroad to accomplish the destruction of the French Republic. Thus by contributing your money to prevent the French from dictating a constitution to us, you assist your countrymen in forcing one upon them. Does it not therefore appear that by subscribing you offend against your own principle ? Ought you not to be neutral ?

Some very respectable Gentlemen who disapprove the war, reasoned with me thus in favor of illuminating on occasion of Lord Howe's success. We rejoice in the defeat of the French at sea, because had we been vanquished, they might have attempted to land an army on our coast ; but we should not rejoice to hear that the Duke of York had beaten the French on the Continent -

Continent, because that would bring us nearer to the accomplishment of our despotic project to dragoon the French nation into the acceptance of a Constitution drawn up by us.

What would such persons have done had the news of some great advantage obtained by the Duke of York, arrived at the same time, and one act of illumination served for the victories both of him and Lord Howe? To have expressed their state of mind, their mixture of joy and sorrow, they must have lighted one window, and left the other in darkness, they must have laughed on one side of their face, and cried on the other. This distinction between success at sea and on the continent was first discovered, I suspect, by the penetrating eye of fear or interest, which may have obtained an insensible influence over the minds of these worthy Gentlemen. I should like to see how they would act, if the Duke of York's trumpet

trumpet, grown familiar to the sound of defeat, should again salute their ears with the unwelcome greeting of victory. Would they not, do you think, be struck with some new reason for joining in a general illumination ?

But let us not forget to examine this distinction of theirs. If a victory at sea might prevent the French from landing on our coast, and attempting to destroy our Constitution, so it might further our design of dictating one to them. After having *thoroughly* beaten their fleet, we might, agreeably to our original project, land an army in France to assist the few who are still disposed to erect the royal standard; or we might make a capture of the provision fleet from other countries, and thus promote our plan of starving them into compliance with our *fine quan* condition of laying down our arms, the establishment of monarchy in France. How then can these Gentlemen testify joy in

in an event which, if it have a tendency to prevent what they disapprove in one way, has an equal, if not a stronger, tendency to promote what they no less disapprove in another. It is likewise for their consideration that they join the crowd in furnishing the minister with an argument for continuing a war which they wish to be discontinued, for in support of his declaration that the people are in favor of the war, he will beyond doubt appeal to the great number who subscribed and illuminated.

A seeming difficulty, rather than an argument, may probably have occurred to some, and it will not be irrelevant to notice it. They may have felt that they could not rejoice at all in Lord Howe's victory and therefore have disliked to illuminate, they may also have disliked to omit illuminating, lest they should be looked upon as disaffected persons, and enemies to their country, and thus pass for what they are not, as much as if they had illuminated

luminated. To such I reply—I know not how *you* may have decided, but to *me* there is no difficulty in what part you ought to have taken. If you perform a single action which evidently speaks a language different from your feelings, you forfeit all pretensions to the character of sincerity and uprightness ; but if by avoiding to do what your conscience cannot warrant, others draw an erroneous conclusion, you incur no guilt. In the former case, you mislead others, in the latter, they mislead themselves. To illuminate necessarily indicates joy, if you feel no joy and yet join in the general act, you are a Hypocrite ; not to illuminate argues no more than a non-participation of the public rejoicing, because success may tend to promote the object of a war which appears to you unjust, or to set peace at a greater distance. If a different and unfavorable interpretation be put upon your conduct, you afford no ground for it, there is no fault in you. To defeat the obloquy you may take an opportunity

opportunity to explain yourselves ; it is better to specify your motives for *not* doing what you could *not* approve, than for doing what in your own judgment is wrong. In the former case, you would attract the esteem of the virtuous ; in the latter, you would be exposed to what you merit, to their contempt. Or even supposing that no explanation could possibly take place, is it not more virtuous to submit to calumny, than perform a deed abhorrent to your principles ?

Thus have I endeavored, not only to invalidate the reasons urged in favor of contributions towards the new levies, and of illumination upon the news of victory, but to obviate even a scruple which may have presented itself to some minds. I now beg leave to add a few observations which seem decisive on this subject.

Whether it were constitutional *first* to send circular letters to the Lord Lieutenants

of Counties, authorising them to raise troops, and enter into subscriptions for that purpose, and *afterwards* to solicit the consent of the House of Commons, I shall not enquire. Were it in proof that these contributions were illegal, because application was not made to Parliament at the proper point of time, the argument would be no longer good, than whilst the informality subsisted. My reasoning shall be founded on grounds not so easily to be removed.

I address myself both to the Approvers and Disapprovers of the war—General illuminations, when once the practice is begun, will be adopted upon the intelligence of every trifling success, and thus the animosities of party will be kept alive, prejudices heated, and licentiousness encouraged. But independent on this consideration, not only illuminations, but subscriptions of this kind, operate as a Test; they hold up persons who cannot conscientiously join in them, as objects of odium, and expose them to

to popular outrage. This reason, if there were no other, would prevent me from subscribing or illuminating, though I were amongst the strongest advocates for the war. No less forcible is this observation, if applied to some other cases. Had it been duly attended to, the very numerous friends to Monarchy and the Ecclesiastical Establishment would not have rushed in such bodies to subscribe the declaration against Republicans and Levellers of property. A Repub-~~lican~~^{and} and Leveller ! supposing these terms to be synonymous, why is he to be made the object of public detestation ? Let him, and let every one, who commits a breach of the peace, and disturbs the order of Society, be punished ; but let opinions be free from penalties and incapacities—let persecution be no more known amongst us.

July 28th. 1794.



OBSERVATOR.